

MEDIEVALIST'S
THE FIVE-MINUTE GUIDE



**TO SURVIVING THE
ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE**

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INTRODUCTION

As we face the threat of the imminent zombie apocalypse, you may wonder how you will deal with a world unlike any you've known before. A world without electricity or central heating. A world in which you must hunt and grow your own food. A world in which you must live behind strong walls in order to repel a dire threat in human form.

In the coming time of crisis, we'll need the wisdom of the distant past more than ever before. This booklet brings together tried and tested survival tips from the Middle Ages to help you adapt to your new reality as you fend off the flesh-eating zombies at the gate. Use this booklet to stay alive and keep down the number of the undead for your own sake, and humanity's.

We all know it's coming. It's only a matter of time.

SURVIVAL TIP

Print this booklet out. When the apocalypse comes and your electronic devices die, you can't use a pdf for kindling.

WEAPONS

When the zombie apocalypse hits, the first thing you'll need is weapons. Guns will be the easiest way to inflict the devastating head wound necessary to kill a zombie, but bullets will eventually become hard to come by, so you'll need other options. Your best bet is to raid an outdoor goods store for archery equipment and knives. If this is not possible, consider getting medieval.

BOWS

The deadliest bow in history was the English longbow, a six-foot-long shaft with a hundred-pound draw weight, but as anyone who's ever tried to shoot one will tell you, a bow is only as good as its archer. Start with a shorter bow that you can manage, made from a flexible young tree. Yew is ideal. Don't forget to give your bow a couple of shallow notches at the top and bottom to give your bowstring a place to sit. Wrap leather around the centre for a more comfortable grip, a more attractive aesthetic, and a good place to rest your arrow.

To make a quick bowstring, take thread or twine and put a small loop in each end. Loop one end onto your bow and twist the string to give it tension, then hook the other end onto the bow. This is not going to be ideal by any means, but it may keep you alive until you can make yourself a strong, flexible string out of animal intestine. If your string snaps or doesn't work, fall back on its other occasional medieval use: swing it like a bat.

ARROWS

Arrows should be as straight as you can make them, in a harder wood. Fletching can be made from just about any type of feather, two or three per arrow. You won't have time to be too fussy with making arrowheads at first, so something fairly easy to split into the right shape – like flint – is a good option. Pieces of shrapnel or broken glass are other good options in a pinch. Remember to put a little cut (nock) in the back of your arrow to keep it steady on the string as you draw.

Once you get to be adept at making arrows and you have a stronger bow, you can experiment with little glass vials of oil, which you can light just before you shoot for a long-distance Molotov cocktail, as Muslim archers used during the crusades.

SWORDS

You're not likely to find a sword lying around, but if you do, they are extremely handy at delivering the type of head-severing stroke you'll need to kill zombies. When you're first using a sword, you'll probably need two hands to deliver a hard enough blow to

sever a human head. Just be sure before you lift your arms to wind up that your body is protected, as you'll be leaving it vulnerable to bites.

KNIVES

After the apocalypse, it'll be necessary for everyone to begin carrying knives around, just as people did in the Middle Ages. Knives are not only weapons, but important tools for building, making weapons, and eating. Keep them in a sheath on your belt for easy access.

Fortunately, knives are going to be some of the easiest weapons to get hold of, as there should be a wide range in nearly every kitchen you come across. You'll want at least one that's big, intimidating, and easy to sharpen to use as a weapon; one that's easy to carry everywhere, to use as a tool; and one serrated one for sawing through antlers or bones. Sharpen your knife on a whetstone, or a handy piece of ceramic.

When fighting with a knife, remember to stay on the offensive. Knives are not very useful for defending, so strike early and strike quickly.

SPEARS

If guns are available, it may seem silly to think of using a spear, but with enough practice, you can impale a zombie or kill it. A spear shouldn't be much taller than you are, and should be made of a hard wood, if possible. It'll need a tip that can take a repeated beating, so go with stone, if you can.

Don't just practice throwing your spear: get used to the balance and weight of it. A spear can be useful for stabbing zombies to keep them at a distance, and if the tip breaks, you can use it as a quarterstaff. If at all possible, practice using your spear in different situations: from a height, from a window, or from a moving vehicle or horseback. That way, you can be prepared for any eventuality, and look cool doing it.

OTHER WEAPONS

The best weapon is the one you have handy, so practice offensive and defensive maneuvers using whatever you have. Axes are always good, but golf clubs, bats, and even rocks can keep you from becoming a member of the undead.

SURVIVAL TIP

Whenever possible, people who will be using these weapons should build their upper body strength daily. Knights used chores such as cutting wood to prepare their bodies to swing a weapon overhead, and climbed ladders and walls using only their arms to build strength in their shoulders, backs, abs, and arms. Daily practice won't just give you a great physique, though. It'll keep you alive long enough to enjoy it.

SHELTER

They say a man's home is his castle, and this is certainly going to be true post-apocalypse: your home will be a fortress that you live in. While it's more likely that you'll be holed up in an abandoned home or other modern building instead of a castle, there are some defensive techniques you can borrow from the Middle Ages to better your chances of survival.

WATER

The most common form of medieval warfare, and the most likely to happen to you, is a siege. When you're under siege, you're forced to wait out the attack for as long as it takes. One of the most critical things to look for when choosing a place to stay, then, is access to clean water.

If you can choose a place to stay that has a reliable well inside the walls, this is your best bet. Building a fortress around a stream or river is unwise, as it leaves you vulnerable to attack through these holes. A grate of bars or chicken wire might help, but this is still a weak spot in your defenses, especially if the zombies learn to swim.

If creating a well is not possible, develop a system to collect as much rainwater as you can. Divert eavestroughs into barrels, and channel any rainwater into containers to help keep you alive if the zombie siege lasts. Boil all water before drinking it and be sure to stir the water to keep away mosquitoes: the other creature eager to eat you.

WOOD

There will come a time when you'll run out of gas or propane and will have to rely on wood for heat and cooking. Make sure your home is near to a wooded area for easy access to the trees you need for fuel, building, and weapons. Clear the area immediately surrounding your home of trees to give you better sightlines, and reduce the risk of any fire spreading from outside in. Give the job of woodcutting to your warriors: they will be able to defend themselves best out in the open, and the work of chopping wood will build strength and character.

WALLS

A castle-building tip from the Middle Ages: if one wall is good, more are better. The more walls you have in concentric rings around your home, the better defended it is. Medieval castle walls were usually extremely thick, and yours should be, too, but don't be discouraged if you don't have that many stones. You can use the medieval trick of building the inside and the outside of your walls with stone and filling in the middle with gravel, sand, or other debris. Use the top of the wall as a walkway for lookouts or

top it with barbed wire or broken glass. Make sure the outside of your wall is as smooth as possible to prevent anyone from getting footholds or handholds in it.

You can use all of the space within the rings of walls for things like gardens or storage, so long as you can fall back to the central keep where you can stay secure until you fight off the zombies, or die of starvation.

MOATS AND DITCHES

Creating a moat can be extremely tricky and take time, but it's possible to build one by diverting a river around your fortress. Moats should be as deep and wide as you can make them, and they should still surround walls with no handholds, in case the zombies actually do learn to swim.

As an alternative, you can build your fortress on an island and use the water as a natural barrier. This complicates bringing in supplies, however, and may have the additional danger of your everyday sounds carrying across the water and drawing attention to your home. Especially if you have children with you.

Ditches are easier and more practical to build, even though they will take time. Line your ditch with wooden spikes to make it harder to get across, and to impale your enemies if they fall into it. As an extreme measure, you can line your ditch with flammable materials and set fire to it if the zombie army approaches to give you time to fall back to your keep. Make sure your wall is made of stone before you try this.

WINDOWS

Human beings need sunlight and air, so you'll need to have windows in your home, no matter how fortified it is. If your glass is broken, use wooden shutters, cloth, or fur to cover it. If you happen to live near cattle, save their horns, soak, unroll and flatten them to make a translucent window. Remember to close your curtains after dark to keep from drawing attention to yourself.

SURVIVAL TIP

There is a common visual image of medieval siege warfare in which people pour boiling oil on their attackers from up on the walls. Medieval people knew this was wasteful. Save your oil for cooking or making fire arrows and pour boiling water on your attackers, instead.

DEFENDING YOUR HOME

Keep a store of projectiles handy so you can throw them down on your enemies from the safety of your walls. Rocks are best, but heavy household items and Molotov cocktails will deter the zombies at the gates. If you choose to use fire close to your own walls, urine-soaked hides may help keep your home from catching fire.

FOOD

No matter where you decide to hole up or build your fortress, a primary concern is going to be food. In the short term, canned and dry food you can scavenge from abandoned homes and stores will be vital. In the long term, you'll have to think about growing and storing your own food. Be sure to add detailed books on farming and wild plants in your area to your zombie apocalypse kit before fleeing.

PICKING YOUR SITE

Given that you won't have any heavy equipment to remove stumps, pick a field that doesn't have too many trees, and that has easy access to water. Pay attention to how the water runs when it rains. This will tell you about how easy or difficult it'll be keep your plants watered without drowning them.

Pick a spot that is big enough to grow a variety of plants, but small enough that you can manage to plough it. An acre is a medieval unit which describes how much land could be ploughed by a team of oxen in a day. Odds are, you won't have a team of oxen, so unless you have a lot of strong workers, don't expect to be able to plough as much as an acre a day.

If you're scouting for a homestead in the winter, look for animal tracks in the snow. This will tell you how much – and what kind of – game to expect, and where to set traps. Pick a site where you'll be able to hunt big enough game to feed your group of survivors, and where you see the least amount of zombie tracks.

STORING YOUR FOOD

When you stock up for the apocalypse, or when you raid a grocery store, be sure to gather as much salt as you can (table salt, not road salt). If you live by the ocean, soaking cloth in seawater and allowing the water to evaporate in the sun will gain you salt over time, although it will be a lengthy process. Smoking and salting meat and fish will get you through the times when food is scarce. Hanging meat from the rafters near your cooking area will keep it dry and out of reach of scavengers.

When you're building your fortress, remember that you'll need to store food, and plenty of it in case one day you're besieged by zombies. Dig into the ground to build yourself a place to keep your food cool and dry, but first ensure your storage area is not prone to flooding in the spring.

If you're scavenging, choose containers that are metal or thick plastic to prevent rodents getting inside. If you can manage it, get a person who won't be working in the fields to practice pottery using river clay and a makeshift wheel. Clay is not only useful for making storage containers, but also cups, plates, and baking pots. Cover clay jars with a piece of cloth and seal with wax to keep food tasting fresh.

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Living in a zombie-infested world means making the most of things, including waste. Designate a place to collect kitchen waste for compost so you can use it to fertilize your garden. Dry seeds to plant later and reanimate limp vegetables with water.

Don't throw away the parts of an animal that you don't eat, either. Fur and leather can be used for clothes, shoes, curtains, rugs, and blankets. Antlers and bones can be used for hilts, sewing needles, combs, and even skate blades. Horns can be used to make windows, candlesticks, and drinking cups. Intestine can be used to make sausages and bowstrings. Feathers can be used to stuff pillows, mattresses, and coats, as well as for writing when your pens run out of ink. Using every part of an animal means fewer trips afield, and less risk of having to run from zombies while carrying loads of supplies.

COOKING

Cooking without electricity can result in flavourful food, if not instant meals. Several chickens at once can be roasted on a spit over an open fire, with regular basting and rotation, and wild game like rabbit or squirrel can be a good addition of protein to a stew.

Pottage is a filling, porridge-like stew which can be made with nearly any grain, vegetable, and meat, simmered slowly over low heat overnight to make a warm, medieval-style breakfast. More water or ingredients can be added over the day to stretch it further and decrease texture.

Once supplies of international spices have run out, you'll have to make do with local herbs. Fortunately, many herbs will be easy to grow in your garden or on your windowsill. In the northern hemisphere, you'll have oregano, thyme, sage, and basil, but you'll have to do without cinnamon – at least until the zombies have receded enough that worldwide communication and reliable trade routes can be reestablished. So, probably quite some time.

SURVIVAL TIP

Bread can be made out of a huge variety of different ingredients. Although most of us tend to eat bread made from wheat flour, people have survived on bread made out of barley flour, oat flour and even acorns. Gluten-free flour will likely be much harder to come by than acorns post-apocalypse, however.

MEDICINE

One of the toughest challenges we'll face after the zombies take over will be a lack of good medicine. At the beginning of the outbreak, be sure to secure as many antibiotics and painkillers as possible as you flee, but save them for emergencies. Remember to stock up on the drugs you and your fellow survivors take every day, too. You may not get more for a long time.

PAIN AND FEVER

An ancient tried-and-true method for relieving pain is using willow bark. You can either chew it or brew it in a tea to get some relief. It may be best to carry some with you when you venture out beyond your walls. You never know what – or who – you might encounter.

BURNS

If you burn yourself while lighting the cooking fire or lighting a fire arrow, don't put butter on it – if you still have butter. Instant relief can be found by immersing the burn in cold water. For more lasting relief, keep snails in your garden. They're good for the plants, and the mucous they leave behind will soothe your burn. Rub some snail slime into the burn to keep the skin moist and relieve the pain.

CUTS

Wash superficial cuts and bind them with clean cloth once you've run out of modern bandages. Pack open wounds with clean cloth, spider webs, or moss to absorb the blood. If you have time, stitch up a gaping wound with a needle and thread (tiny, sharp needles can be carved out of bone if you don't have access to a modern one), or cauterize the wound with a superheated piece of metal.

If you've run out of antibiotics, use honey to bind cuts together and keep them clean. Strong alcohol poured on wounds can help kill bacteria, and poured into people may make them drowsy and sluggish enough to treat them.

Cuts must be watched carefully for signs of gangrene. If the skin around the cut begins to turn black or smelly, it may be best to sever the limb at the next joint and cauterize the site of amputation. Save your antibiotics for these severe wounds, and don't use them up on the common cold, tempting as it might be.

UPSET STOMACH

Some herbal teas can help with upset stomachs, including ginger for nausea, and peppermint for gas and indigestion.

DENTISTRY

The best medicine for teeth is an ounce of prevention. It's imperative to make sure to clean your teeth after eating anything sugary, as our modern diets have exposed our teeth to more sugar than ever before. If you don't have a toothbrush or toothpaste, scrub your teeth gently with a cloth and an abrasive (edible) substance like salt or dried, ground sage. You can also use a clean stick to gently rub the tartar off.

Dental surgery is possible, but inadvisable. Medieval people filled their teeth and created bridges, but this was using the collective wisdom of a network of professionals. Unless your group of survivors includes a trained dentist, your best bet is to clean your teeth. And, it goes without saying, avoid zombies' teeth at all costs.

HYPOTHERMIA

Unfortunately, we cannot predict when the zombie apocalypse will hit, so there is a chance that you may be stuck out in cold weather while escaping. Treat hypothermia by warming victims with skin-to-skin contact, or wrapping them in blankets. Do not use alcohol to warm someone up – it has the opposite effect, and may vastly increase the awkwardness of the necessary skin-to-skin contact.

HEAT STROKE

If the apocalypse arrives during summer, avoid heat stroke by keeping your head covered, and drink as much water as possible. There is reason to suggest that zombies have a keen sense of smell, so be sure to wash off sweat odours when you stop to drink, for everyone's sake.

ZOMBIE BITES

Unfortunately, there is no known cure for a zombie bite, and in time the victim will inevitably become one of the undead. The only option is to say goodbye to your loved one and kill him quickly, ensuring that you utterly destroy his brain after he dies.

SURVIVAL TIP

Birth control is something to ensure you pack when you gather your pharmaceutical supplies on your way out of civilization. Eventually, however, you will run out. To prevent pregnancy, you can use chamomile, the seeds from Queen Anne's lace or pomegranates, or a number of other herbs. If you live in the Nile delta, crocodile dung may also be used as a pessary to disrupt your pH. Please note that none of these options will be effective 100% of the time, so all parties should plan their sleeping arrangements accordingly.

OTHER USEFUL TIPS

When the zombies attack, your first order of business must be survival. Food, shelter, medicine, and weapons will be the focus of your daily life for months. Over time, however, you'll need to look to the future, and to your survival beyond just the next day or two. Optimism is the key to staying out of the reach of a zombie's gnashing teeth. Here are some useful tips to help you go from surviving to thriving.

STAY CLEAN

Nothing makes you feel more human than being clean. If you run out of premade soap, make your own. Ash from your fire mixed with animal fat creates lye soap, useful for washing dishes and clothes. Unfortunately, it is alkaline, and tough on the skin, so if you can, use olive oil or glycerin. Mix your soap with herbs to give it a good smell.

For sweet-smelling water, soak rose petals or other flowers. You can use this water to wash your hands and face when you need a pick-me-up. For fresh breath, chew some cloves or wintergreen leaves, or brew up some peppermint tea.

GIVE BEES A CHANCE

Bees are handy in a huge variety of ways, which is why beekeeping was a critical part of the premodern world and should be part of your post-apocalyptic one, too. Honey can be used to flavor food or keep wounds clean, and it keeps indefinitely without spoiling. Honey can also be used to create mead, which is a delicious beverage to help vary your diet, and relieve stress. Beeswax can be used to make candles, to seal jars, and to bind things together, as well as to make sweet-smelling lip balm.

TRY MINSTRELSY

Because of the many conveniences of the modern world, we've gotten out of the habit of remembering important information. While it's critical to write vital intelligence down whenever you can, you should begin to train your brain to remember longer strings of information, such as where to find food, or the route to your emergency shelter, should your fortress fall to the zombies. Try using the medieval method of passing along information and news: turn it into a rhyme or a song. If you make it catchy by using an advertising jingle you know, other survivors in your group will remember it. It may save their lives if it doesn't drive them crazy first.

TRAIN AN ANIMAL

Once you settle into a place, it may be possible to train an animal in your area to help ensure your survival. Horses can be trained not only to pull a plough or cart, or to carry a rider, but also to use their hooves as weapons. Train your horse to rear up without

throwing you and stomp on a watermelon standing in for a zombie, and you'll have another weapon in your arsenal.

Hawks can be trained, with patience, to capture other birds and small animals and return them to you. This is a very handy way to catch small and fast creatures which might easily be missed by an arrow, but that will taste wonderful in a stew. If you train your hawk especially well, it may gather food for you in this way even if you're trapped inside by besieging zombies.

Pigeons can also be trained to help out and carry messages from place to place. With the fall of great cities to the zombie onslaught, many pigeons will be searching for new homes and more food. Catching several and training them over time will help you communicate with other survivors. The pigeons that fail to learn will be delicious.

WRITE YOUR STORY

It's imperative that we leave a record of our trials and tribulations under the threat of being eaten by our own dead for the people who may come after us. Paper will become scarce as it gets used up for writing, fuel, and toilet paper, so practice your words by writing on piece of wood covered in wax.

You can create a quill pen out of almost any kind of feather, although goose quills are large and have the most space to be re-sharpened. Cut the tip of your quill on an angle, then put a small split in it. Make ink out of old tea (if you still have some), leaves, or berries. If you do run out of paper, stretch, scrape, and dry animal skin to create parchment. Do not attempt to make parchment out of zombie skin.

MAKE FRIENDS

Although there will undoubtedly be unscrupulous people out there who will be more interested in taking your shelter than sharing it, it will be necessary to make friends and expand your community for the sake of the gene pool, if not companionship. Eventually, someone will start up a trade route, so use this connection with the outside world to learn what's going on and where. Exercise caution and keep a knife in your boot, but try to give people at least some benefit of the doubt. At the very least, take comfort in the fact that if they do kill you, you will be free to eat them afterward.

SURVIVAL TIP

Nights will be long without the distraction of bingeing on your favourite television shows. To keep yourself and your fellow survivors entertained, you can do what medieval people did: play board games like chess or backgammon; read books aloud to each other; tell stories; or play instruments. Not attracting zombie attention is a handy excuse medieval people never had to ask someone to stop playing the recorder.

AFTERWORD

I made a joke at a talk I gave recently that at least one of the people in the room was probably there to learn some tips on how to survive the zombie apocalypse, not realizing that the very latest episode of the world's most popular zombie show featured someone sharing medieval wisdom with post-apocalyptic survivors. My husband and I have been making jokes for years about how my knowledge of medieval daily life might come in handy some post-apocalyptic day. Here is some of it for your enjoyment.

Most of the information in this little booklet is actually based on the daily life and wisdom of medieval Europeans, and most of it would work (at least to a point) to help someone in a survival situation. I've always found it fascinating to think about the little ways in which people went about their lives without electricity and modern technology, and to consider how we'd make that transition back if it came down to it. Given the choice, though, I'm much happier with central heating.

You can read more of my work in my book [The Five-Minute Medievalist](#), or you can [visit my website](#) to find out more about what I do.

If you've enjoyed this book, please [let me know](#), and let other people know, too! Tag me **@5MinMedievalist** and/or use the hashtag **#GetMedievalOnZombies** on social media and give your friends a fighting chance for the future.

Stay safe out there...

Danièle



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FURTHER READING

All of the information in this booklet is common enough knowledge among historians that it can be found in multiple sources, but here are a few compilations that contain much of it together. You might want to add these to your post-apocalyptic library:

Bennett, Matthew, et al. *Fighting Techniques of the Medieval World, AD 500-AD 1500: Equipment, Combat Skills, and Tactics*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2005.

Green, Monica, Ed. & Trans. *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Mount, Toni. *Dragon's Blood and Willow Bark: The Mysteries of Medieval Medicine*. Stroud, UK: Amberley, 2015.

Prestwich, Michael. *Knight: The Medieval Warrior's (Unofficial) Manual*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.

Or you can read my compiled articles at Medievalists.net.

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DISCLAIMER

This booklet is meant to be read for the sake of interest and humour only. None of it is intended to be taken seriously as survival advice.

Please keep yourself safe from zombies and from any other harm by using this book responsibly, and by taking actual wise, sensible advice on how to keep yourself from being eaten.

Thanks,
DC